



# PARKING MATTERS



## Technical Report 11.1 CHARACTER AREAS

Prepared for the  
**Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission**  
and the  
**City of Savannah Department of Mobility and Parking Services**

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# Technical Report 11.1

## Character Areas

This report discusses how earlier efforts in the Parking Matters study analyzed and subdivided the overall study area. The study encompasses a large portion of Central Savannah, corresponding roughly with the grid street plan extending from the Savannah River to Victory Drive. In order to develop a more nuanced set of strategic approaches for parking and mobility, the study team defined a series of character areas that allowed a more specialized and responsive treatment of parking and mobility needs and to discern challenges for different parts of central Savannah.

Previous technical reports for the Parking Matters study have documented observed levels of parking utilization and modeled parking demand based on future development and land use change understood at the time of the study. The latter analysis, which modeled and estimated overall parking demand, divided the Parking Matters study area into a series of districts to capture a more realistic potential for shared parking. Likewise, the addition of the Starland district and its surrounding neighborhoods (specifically, the area between 37th Street and Victory Drive, and between Bulloch and East Broad Streets), was driven by recent redevelopment activity in that area and a need to understand the potential impact on available parking supply. Both of these subarea-specific approaches, in addition to more detailed understanding of the study area's various characteristics, pointed to different potential treatments of parking in the overall Parking Matters study area.

The report outlines the basic criteria for determining these areas and how these areas responded to different needs and opportunities identified during the Parking Matters study. While the study is not proposing these areas as an official system or designation, it does define the distinguishing characteristics of each with general recommendations for parking policy priorities to be finalized later in the study.

## CHARACTER AREAS BY URBAN FORM

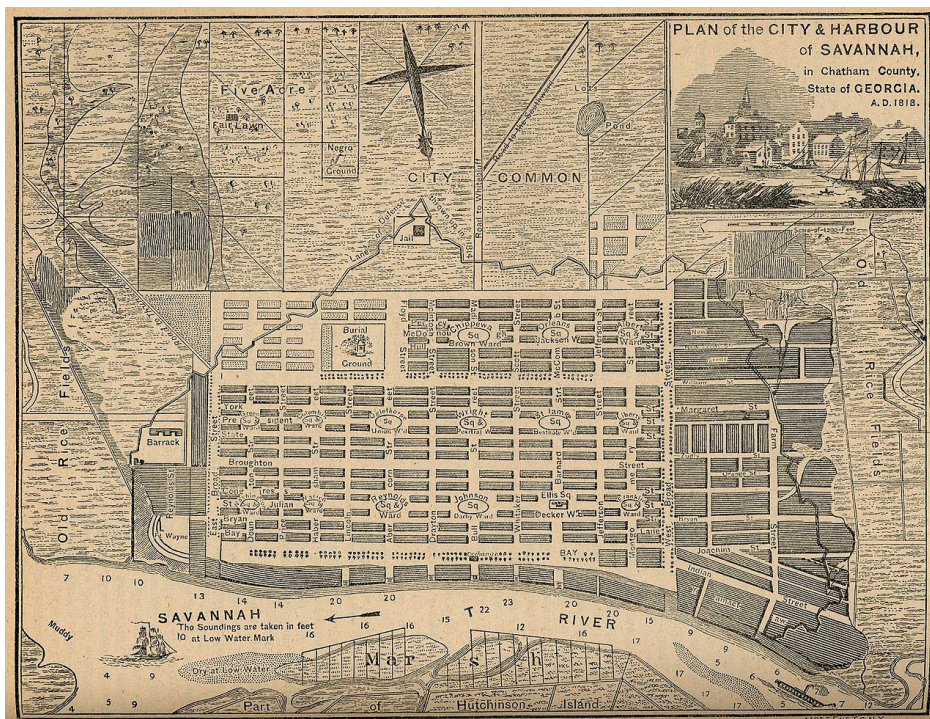
Savannah's famous Oglethorpe plan laid the city out along the Savannah River, with East and West Broad Streets (the latter renamed to today's Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) forming its boundaries and today's Liberty Street being the original city edge. As Savannah expanded away from the river, it replicated the plan's ward system as far south as today's Gaston Street. This overall area, now defined as the Savannah Landmark Historic District and listed as a landmark district on the National Register of Historic Places, features the public squares for which the city's plan became world-renowned.

However, the Parking Matters study area extends into several other districts with distinct identities. South of Gaston Street, the ward layout ends and streets are no longer interrupted by squares, although the pattern of alternating streets and lanes parallel to the river continues and Forsyth Park interrupts the grid for nearly half a mile between Gaston Street and Park Avenue. South of 33rd Street, the regular pattern of lanes also ends, leading to blocks of different

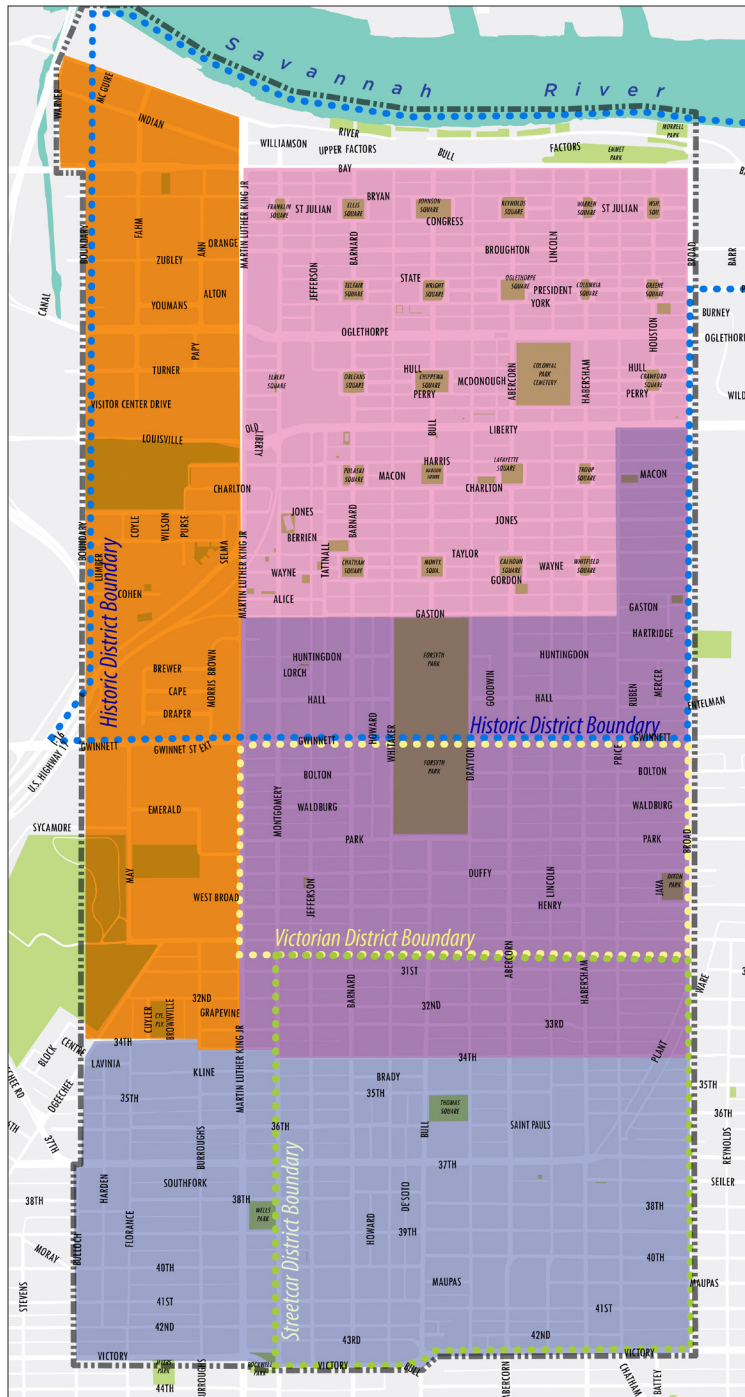
dimensions and many streets not aligning across the width of the study area. Throughout these historical changes in urban form, individual lot dimensions also changed. Neighborhoods in the south of the study area are part of Savannah's streetcar suburbs and feature a continuation of the gridiron street pattern of the Historic and Victorian districts. However, lanes between streets were not platted as extensively as in the older parts of the city, placing much more importance on the street right-of-way itself to handle a variety of transportation and service functions.

West of today's Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the Oglethorpe Plan was not applied and a different type of urban form took shape, driven largely by the shipping and railroad uses that emerged in this area. This was the endpoint of Savannah's first major railroads and as such did not feature the same fine-grained street network as the original city.

When considered with housing and building types in these different parts of the study area, the overall potential for density changed throughout the study area, as did the density of the street network.



*Savannah's city plan shown in 1818. The layout of the Oglethorpe Plan created a series of wards, each of which balanced residential with commercial and civic lots around a public square. Today this has left the city with a dense street network capable of supporting a full range of transportation modes, including ample on-street parking.*



## Character Areas by Urban Form

### Historic District: Oglethorpe Plan

Regular spacing of streets and lanes as well as squares: plentiful street parking, vehicle maneuvering around squares may mean that parking is restricted in certain locations. Loading and special curbside needs more frequent.

### Historic District: Streets and Lanes

Corresponds generally with southern third of Historic District and Victorian District. Does not feature squares, but keeps the same regular grid of mid-block lanes potentially providing access to parking and service functions.

### Streetcar Suburbs

Corresponds generally with Streetcar District, primarily south of 33rd Lane where regular spacing of lanes ends, and also includes Cuyler-Brownsville district. Properties are more reliant on streets for parking, though some blocks feature lanes and some single-family residential lots even have driveways.

### Western Additions

Consists mainly of former industrial sites located adjacent to historic railroads; today also includes two of Savannah's major public housing complexes. Street grid is less regular, with most thoroughfare streets continuing west as regional highways, and many land uses provide their own parking.



## CHARACTER AREAS BY LAND USE

The mix of land uses in a given area was a key factor in defining the character districts, as the finer-grain mixed use of the downtown historic district stands apart from the other, more single-use parts of the Parking Matters study area. Many of these other areas are primarily residential in nature but feature commercial uses and other neighborhood-serving uses along key corridor streets. Technical Report 4.1 discusses the land use patterns of the district in greater detail, using Chatham County Property Assessor records to define both the land uses and intensities throughout the Parking Matters study area. This report also subdivided the study area into smaller districts for purposes of understanding how complementary land uses could share parking.

### Commercial Core

Much of the Downtown Historic District north of Oglethorpe Street and west of Habersham Street features a fine-grained mix of land uses, with commercial retail, office and residential uses often sharing single buildings; churches, government buildings, and facilities of the Savannah College of Art and Design are also primary features of this part of the study area. Four of the five City-owned parking garages are in this primary commercial district, which is one of the Savannah area's primary employment centers and the central focus of its visitor-related uses.

### Oglethorpe Plan Neighborhoods

East of the commercial core, residential land uses are predominant throughout the study area. The transition between the mixed use character of the Commercial Core and the more residentially-focused parts of the Historic District does not follow a definitive line, and indeed there are many non-residential uses that continue into this part of the study area. However, since the urban form of this area follows Savannah's

original Oglethorpe Plan, lots are smaller and many do not allow off-street parking for these residential land uses. As such, streets are highly important for parking and these neighborhoods are where much of the City's residential parking permits are used to ensure availability.

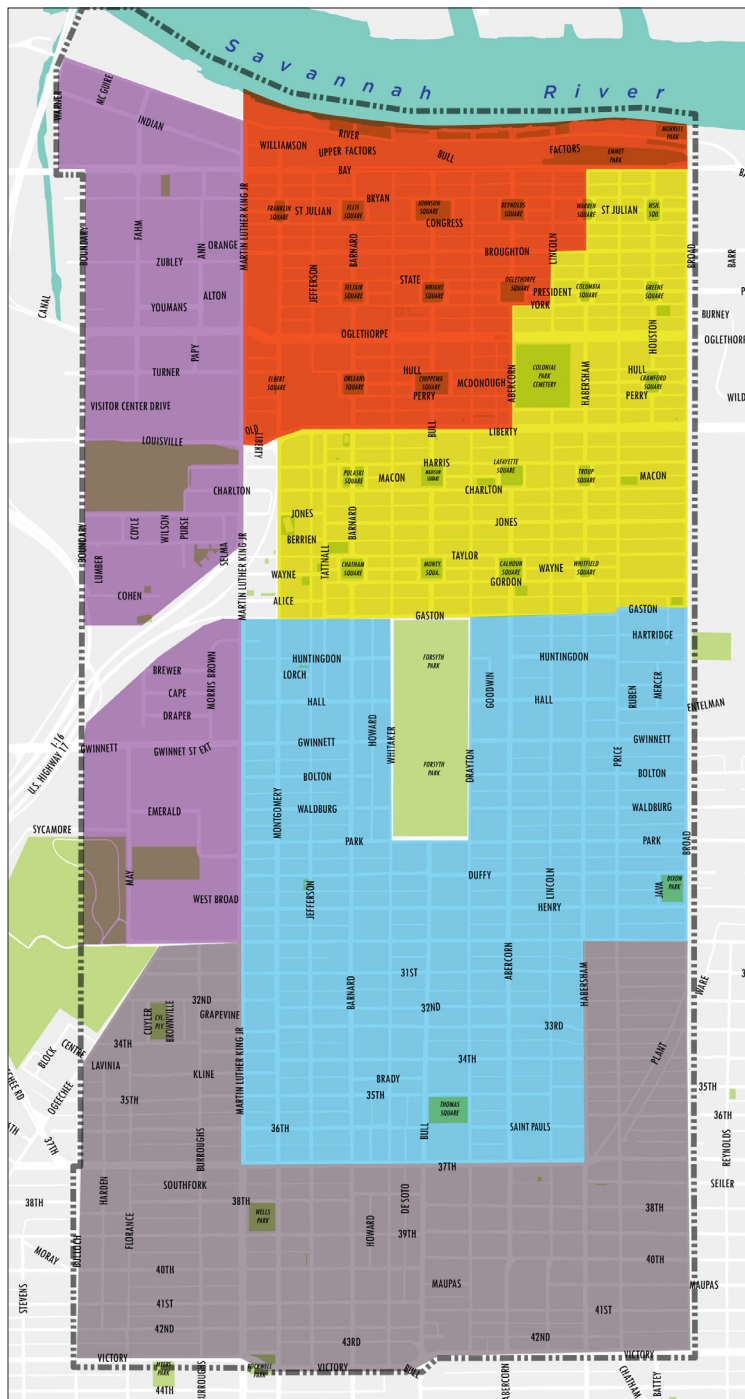
### Victorian and Streetcar Neighborhoods

Although still including part of the Historic Landmark District, the neighborhoods south of Gaston Street do not have the Oglethorpe squares, though they retain many civic and commercial uses, especially churches, mixed into the residential fabric. Commercial uses in this area are focused more in small districts and corridors than in the Historic Core, and although these neighborhoods feature a mix of housing types, large portions of the area continue to rely on streets for their primary parking.

### West of Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King, as one of the bounding streets of the Historic District, marks a change in the overall street network and land use character of downtown. This area historically featured industrial land uses located adjacent to the railroads connecting Savannah to its larger region and the canals that connected these railroad termini to the Savannah River. Today, the district features a mix of service-related uses, public housing complexes (Yamacraw Village and the Kayton and Frazier Homes), and an increasing number of hotels and SCAD buildings, including residential facilities.

Although outside of the Parking Matters study area, the proposed location for a new arena is also west of Martin Luther King, at the intersection of Gwinnett Street and Stiles Avenue.



## Character Areas by Land Use

### Commercial Core

A mixed use district, but also the largest concentration of retail and commercial uses in the study area.

### Oglethorpe Neighborhoods

Primarily residential portions of the historic district; land uses pattern changes from commercial and mixed-use to residential without major physical barriers, likely a reason for high levels of street parking use in these areas.

### Victorian-Streetcar Neighborhoods

Area is primarily residential, though with a variety of housing types (including multifamily houses and buildings) Commercial uses focused on corridors (especially Montgomery and Bull Streets) or located in small corner spaces, with churches and other community uses throughout.

### Single-Family Neighborhoods

Area is primarily residential, though with more single-story, single family homes than in the Victorian District, leading to a lower density of units overall.

### Service and Public Housing

Features two major public housing complexes and larger uses such as Laurel Grove Cemetery, Georgia State Railroad Museum, and many SCAD uses. Northern area, near SCAD Museum, also features several new hotels.

## CHARACTER AREAS BY PARKING ACTIVITY

Technical Report 3.1 provides detail on parking inventory and utilization in the Parking Matters study area, with a series of maps and diagrams illustrating overall patterns of activity. This illustrated a pronounced difference between the Downtown Historic District and areas to its south, especially south of Forsyth Park. As a rule, street parking in these areas is used at much lower rates throughout the day.

### Broughton Street and the Central Business District

Downtown's commercial areas have the most heavily used parking, based largely on their lengthy business hours and number of attractions throughout the day. While conventional daytime business hours for most office and retail uses are the conventional 8-to-5 hours, late-afternoon and evening hours are the typical business times for restaurants, bars, and nightlife establishments that serve both downtown visitors and Savannah residents. For this reason there is parking demand throughout the day in the core district, with peak times occurring in the mid-day and early afternoon and after 7 pm.

This district also includes the River Street corridor, which includes many publicly-accessible parking lots directly on the river that are heavily used, especially during evenings and weekends. This corresponds primarily to visitor and entertainment-related activities, though the parking.

### Neighborhoods North of Forsyth Park

The areas outside of the central business district and north of Forsyth Park feature similar parking activity patterns to the Historic District, although high parking utilization patterns focus on the Bull and Abercorn Street corridors.

### Around and South of Forsyth Park

In general, parking utilization levels are lower south of Gaston Street, with high-demand areas being more concentrated and occurring adjacent to Forsyth Park. The small commercial district along Bull Street immediately south of the park is one such area, and parking activity increases just east of the park at certain times, especially weekends.

### Events Area

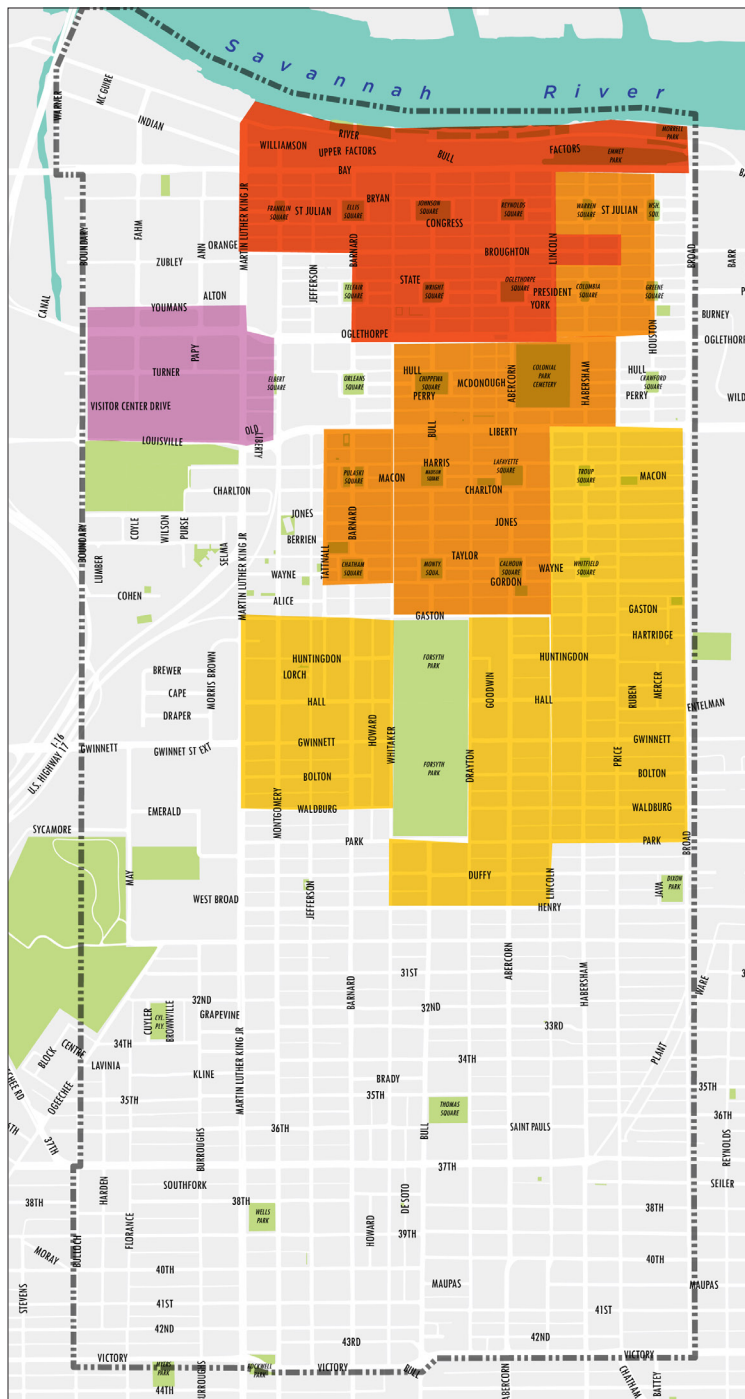
The only area west of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard with sustained high levels of parking activity is between Oglethorpe Avenue and Louisville Road, in the area including the SCAD Museum of Art and the Coastal Georgia Center. This area features metered parking on street, although it also features the Visitor Center Lot and several private off-street parking lots and garages.

## REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

At the time of the Parking Matters study, most of the sites with potential redevelopment activity were located just outside the core study area boundaries, primarily in the warehouse and industrial district centered on Indian Street (between Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and the Talmadge Bridge) and in the Tybee Depot and Trustees Gardens area immediately east of East Broad Street. Although infill development projects were under review throughout the study area, most projects outside of these two peripheral districts were small in scale.

The study's expanded boundaries to Victory Drive, including the Starland district along Bull Street and the surrounding residential neighborhoods, also included a series of potential redevelopment projects. This area has seen both large-scale projects (south end of Bull Street) and new uses locating in existing buildings, mostly in commercial buildings on Bull Street. Both of these have changed the profile of this area's parking and mobility needs.





## Character Areas by Parking Utilization

### Broughton Street - CBD

Highest level of activity, including in two of the four garages. Over half of the streets at or above 85% utilization for at least six continuous hours.

### Neighborhoods North of Forsyth Park

High level of activity, with between a quarter and a half of streets at or above 85% utilization for at least six hours throughout the day.

### Around and South of Forsyth Park

Most streets do not reach or surpass 85% utilization throughout the day, although these high levels may be concentrated in key locations such as business districts or near Forsyth Park.

### Single-Family Neighborhoods

On-street and off-street parking reaches 85% utilization for at least four hours (may be non-consecutive periods) on weekdays.

## SUMMARIZED PARKING AND MOBILITY CHARACTER AREAS

For planning purposes, the study team has identified a series of districts that combine the attributes described in this report. These are not intended to be official districts, but rather illustrate how different concerns and priorities intersect in different parts of the study area and provide guidance on how policy recommendations might be tailored to address them. This section describes each of the districts and the following section outlines specific factors to consider in developing the more detailed parking and mobility recommendations that will result from the Parking Matters study.

It should be noted that the districts described here are not exhaustive of the Parking Matters study area, nor should they need to be: the areas not included in one of these summarized character areas do not show signs of significant deficiency or need for extensive parking or mobility management to better tie them into the overall system of downtown Savannah. The City of Savannah and its agency partners should continue to understand specific needs in these areas, especially if redevelopment or other land use change indicates changes to the overall parking profile of the small areas.

### Historic District Core

This is the area that most community members and stakeholders would refer to as 'Downtown Savannah,' and comprises the majority of the business and entertainment-based establishments in the central core. This generally extends from the Savannah River to Oglethorpe Street and from Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to Habersham. While a distinct northeast-southwest line through part of this district divides residential-based land uses from more business and entertainment uses, this part of the Historic District is generally Savannah's central business district.

In terms of parking, four of the five City-owned parking garages are in this core area.

### Historic District Neighborhood Areas

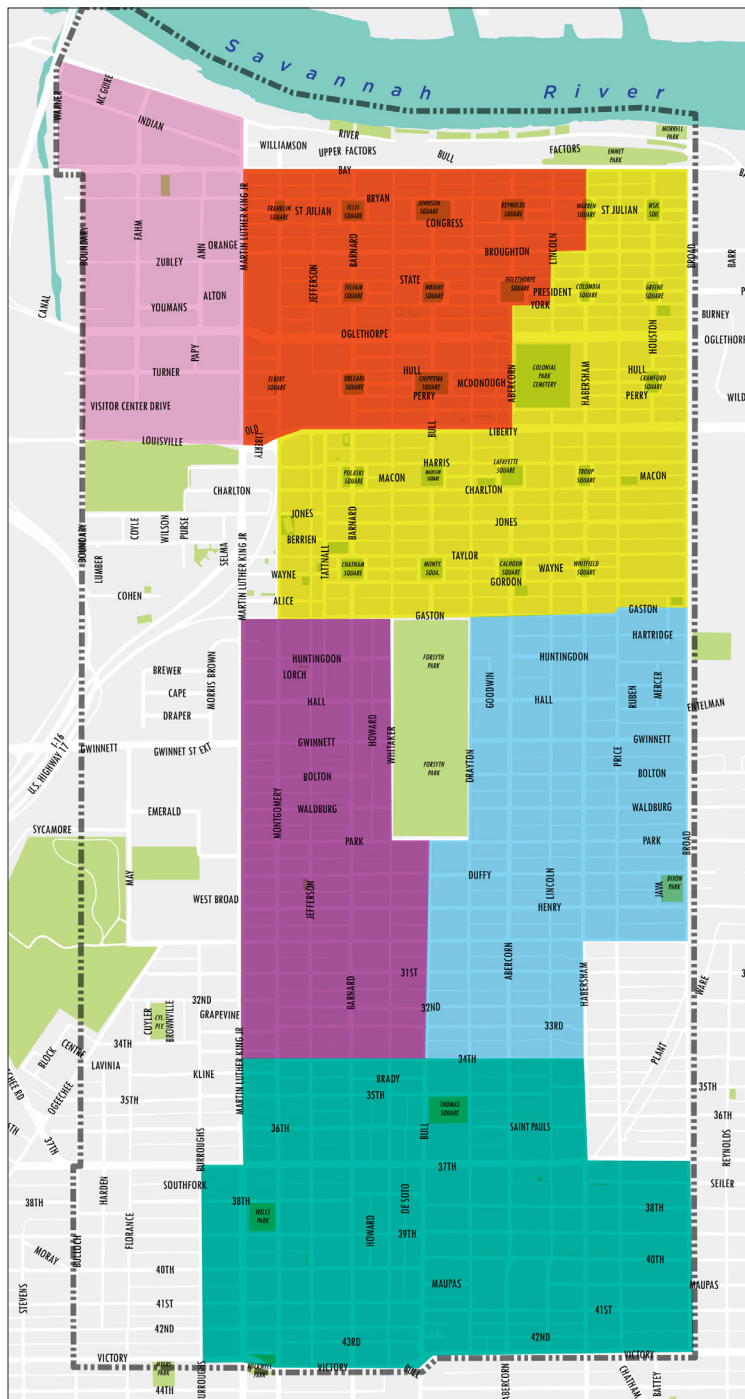
The remainder of the Downtown Historic District is primarily residential, and currently features a mix of parking regulations on-street. There are no parking garages or other major off-street public parking facilities in this area, though its proximity to the Historic District Core appears to drive demand for on-street parking throughout the day, during times when parking demand among area residents is presumably lower than in evenings.

### Events Center and SCAD

The western end of the Parking Matters study area is marked by an expansion of SCAD facilities, including the SCAD Museum of Art, but it also includes major events-based facilities such as the Coastal Georgia Center and the Savannah Civic Center. This is also one of the study area's emerging concentrations of hotels, with several new hotels and more being added. Both of these are important engines of the City's tourism and visitor economy and as such require convenient and reliable access to other parts of the study area, especially the Historic District Core.

### Forsyth Park West

This area sees high levels of parking use in select districts but generally appears to serve a mostly residential population. Throughout most of the day the area offers available street parking. The area is served by east-west corridors offering access to other parts of the city and region, including access to Interstate 16, though it does not have the same degree of multimodal access - in particular, it is not served by any of the current downtown shuttle services and only features one shared-street bicycle connection to the Historic District Core on Barnard Street.



## Summarized Parking and Mobility Character Areas

### Historic District Core

A mixed use district, but also the largest concentration of retail and commercial uses in the study area.

### Historic District Neighborhood Areas

Locations with risk of spillover parking demand from visitors taking critical on-street supply, though also where mobility options are most robust outside of the Historic District Core.

### Events Center and SCAD

Growing area with an increasing need for short-term parking availability and regulation to ensure that key street and public spaces do not become long-term, less costly parking for downtown destinations.

### Forsyth Park West

Area is primarily residential, though would benefit from increased modal options, as these are not as strong as on the east side of the park.

### Forsyth Park East

Areas close to the park, business districts and visitor destinations may need further parking regulation to preserve availability for residents.

### Thomas Square - Streetcar District

Residential areas feature ample supply of on-street parking, though increasing commercial activity points to a need for attention to area-wide parking needs and regulation to ensure overall availability.



## Forsyth Park East

East of the park, there is higher utilization of on-street parking throughout the day; though it does not appear to have a significantly higher concentration of visitor destinations, this area does include neighborhood-serving retail such as a supermarket that may be a factor in these utilization levels. This area is closer to the squares of the Oglethorpe Plan. The area is also served by the Dot shuttle and likely draws some visitor parking due to its lack of regulation or pricing. It also features completed bicycle lanes on Lincoln and Price Streets, allowing a broader set of travel options into the downtown core than on the west side of the park.

## Thomas Square and the Streetcar District

These areas feature lower levels of on-street parking utilization than the rest of the study area, due in part to fewer non-residential uses but also due to the larger lots and lower land use density of the residential areas. There is generally ample curbside space to handle parking demand, and many non-residential uses feature at least some off-street parking.

## POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

Based on these characteristics, the following concerns and priorities should be considered when developing recommendations for the study area to ensure that the nuances in parking and mobility need are well understood.

### Historic District Core

Because of high demand in this area, management of parking should focus on increasing availability for the numerous attractions and businesses in this part of the City. It is not only the center of the city's tourism industry, but is also the city's downtown and the heart of its cultural life; as such it remains an important destination for Savannahians as well. The following

policy themes should be explored through the Parking Matters study's recommendations:

- Manage the balance between daytime and evening attractions. The Historic Core functions not only as the city's downtown and central business district, but also as its primary entertainment, dining and nightlife district. This is no doubt a result of the rich mix of cultural institutions, historic structures and private and public spaces that enable special events and functions parallel to the day-to-day businesses of the city. For this reason, there is desire to be downtown after the end of the business day, when most office and commercial retail destinations have closed.

### Historic District Neighborhood Areas

These are the areas most prone to spillover from the high parking demand in the Historic District, and the City has developed and expanded its permit program to allow residents of these areas to use on-street parking and be exempt from regulations and pricing.

- Protect from spillover, especially as visitor demand continues to increase in the Historic District Core.
- Understand and manage the nuanced balance between visitor and resident parking demand.

### Events Center and SCAD

The expansion of the SCAD campus in this area has led to increased parking demand, and regulation has followed in some districts.

- Understand and promote safe, convenient connections to the Historic District Core.
- Ensure availability for SCAD-based uses.

## Forsyth Park West

Although mostly residential, this area is bounded by Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and its commercial corridor. Many of these residential areas appear to have no critical needs for additional parking, but it is important to ensure that changes in the area, such as new businesses along Martin Luther King or use of residential properties for short-term rentals and other visitor-related functions, do not create new shortages.

- Manage spillover from nearby commercial and institutional facilities.
- Expand bicycle facilities from the Historic Core to provide a comparable facility to Price Street on the east side of the study area.

## Forsyth Park East

This part of the study area, while also residential in nature, is closer to potential redevelopment activity.

- Preserve neighborhood parking availability with Forsyth Park events.
- Enhance mobility options further south in the district, especially to connect commercial areas to other parts of downtown.

## Thomas Square and the Streetcar District

Recent expansion of SCAD facilities in this area, most notably Arnold Hall, has driven transportation demand in the area.

- Be attentive to changing commercial uses and related parking demand.
- Continue to preserve residential parking.